Learning for Life II

Brighter Futures Together

NOVA SCOTIA
Department of Education

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Minister's Message

Dear partner in education:

I'm very pleased to introduce the new plan for education in Nova Scotia, Learning for Life II—Brighter Futures Together. I cannot think of three more appropriate words to describe the work and direction of this document than Brighter, Futures, and Together. Let me tell you why.

First of all, the initiatives and goals of this plan truly are a collaborative effort. This is a plan we, as partners in education, wrote together. We started with the foundation built by the first Learning for Life plan introduced in 2002, Planning for Student Success. We evaluated the results of that plan and asked for help in choosing the next steps at a Partners' Forum in February 2005. Never before have so many education partners come together to debate, inspire, and shape a new direction for Nova Scotia's education system.

This spirit of partnership is proof that we all believe our children's education is vital to Nova Scotia's future. The quality of education our children receive affects us all. It also affects our future quality of life, because, as we have learned, children learn more than language arts, sciences, and math in school; they learn how to be healthy, confident, contributing members of society. We need to be teaching them how to make good lifestyle choices while we are teaching them to read and write.

The future will be very bright indeed when all of our children have the opportunity to reach their full potential and contribute their own passion, imagination, and energy back into their communities.

The education and health of Nova Scotia's children is this government's priority. We believe the initiatives in this plan will help our children, and all Nova Scotians, take a significant step forward toward that brighter future. That is why we are investing $21.4 million in new funding to support the first year of this plan's recommendations.

We will keep you posted on our progress throughout the year to continue the spirit of partnership started at the Partners' Forum in February 2005. This is not the final step; it is just one more on a significant journey and we believe we are headed in the right direction. Thank you for your contributions and help.

Yours truly,

Jamie Muir

Jamie Muir
Minister of Education

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Executive Summary

The Department of Education, with input from education partners, has developed a new plan for the public education system, *Learning for Life II: Brighter Futures Together*. This four-year plan builds on the foundation of the first Learning for Life plan introduced in 2002. It fulfills the remaining commitments from Learning for Life, as well as the commitments outlined in the government's *Blueprint for building a better Nova Scotia*.

THE PROVINCE MET WITH HUNDREDS OF ITS EDUCATION PARTNERS

To set the planning process in motion, the province met with hundreds of its education partners in February 2005 at its first Partners' Forum. Partners were invited to comment on ideas being considered for improvements to Nova Scotia's public education system. The public was invited to give their opinions as well, via the department's website. In all, hundreds of education partners across Nova Scotia gave oral and written input. In response to some feedback, a draft of the proposed plan went back to the partners for final comments. All of this input has helped to shape *Learning for Life II: Brighter Futures Together*.

Brighter Futures Together includes the final year of commitments made in *Learning for Life*, building on the first two years of *Learning for Life* and the many other positive changes that have already been made in public education. The new plan for education will continue to support smaller class sizes and special education; increase support for diversity and students in the later grades; help students live active, healthy lives; target resources to areas where students and teachers need more support like math and language arts; and emphasize the importance of collaboration and partnership.

Brighter Futures Together is student-centered and based on the following belief statements:

- Students need to have a solid educational background to successfully participate in the global society and economy.
- Student success must be everyone's first priority.

PUBLIC EDUCATION IS A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

- Public school education is a shared responsibility among government, school boards, schools, parents, teachers, students, the community and many other education partners.
- Every student needs opportunities to attain his or her greatest potential, every student can achieve success, and all students need adequate time to learn.

MORE ENGAGED LEARNERS

- By living healthier lifestyles, students can become better, more engaged learners at school, and healthier Nova Scotians for life.

The new plan is organized into six main themes. Each theme's provincial funding for 2005–06 is identified, along with a brief statement of the theme's aims. This is followed by a brief description of the actions that will help achieve those aims and, finally, by a table with additional specific details for each of those actions, particularly for 2005–06.

1. Raising the Bar– 2005–06 Education Funding Allocation $4.3 Million

Raising the Bar sets higher standards for learning and teaching, and recognizes achievements, both in and out of school, that contribute to a student's education. The goal is that every student reaches his or her fullest potential. The initiatives within this theme fall under two general headings:

- Whole School Improvement
- Improvements in Curriculum and Programs

2. Closing the Gap– 2005–06 Education Funding Allocation $8.9 Million

Closing the Gap recognizes that some students are not succeeding in the regular public school system, and they need additional or different types of help. The goal is to help each student achieve success. This requires the contribution and support of many partners. The initiatives in this theme fall within three headings:

- Programs to Help More Students Succeed
- Special Education
- Supports for Education

3. Developing Healthy, Active Learners– 2005–06 Education Funding Allocation $1.8 Million

Developing Healthy, Active Learners recognizes that schools have a role to play in promoting healthy, active living for students. The goal is to help ensure that students become better, more engaged learners at school, and healthier Nova Scotians for life. In addition to the education funding allocation for 2005–06, there is approximately $1.7 million in the Health Promotion budget for targeted allocation to school boards. The initiatives within this theme fall under three headings:

- Health Education, Physical Education and Student Leadership
- Healthy Foods in Schools
- Safe Schools

4. Time to Teach and Time to Learn— 2005–06 Education Funding Allocation $4.6 Million

Providing Time to Teach and Time to Learn recognizes that today's youth need to know much more than ever before if they are to participate fully in a global society. To help students prepare, we can ensure they enter school ready to learn from day 1, we can help them get started right with smaller class sizes in the early years so children have the attention they need from teachers, and we can take a fresh look at the way instructional time is used and structured to ensure students have more time to learn, and teachers more time to teach. There are two general headings within this theme:

- Time on Task
- Smaller Class Sizes

5. Measuring and Reporting on Success— 2005–06 Education Funding Allocation $1.6 Million

Measuring and Reporting on Success supports the importance of having more and better information to make sound educational decisions, and to focus on continuous improvement for students, teachers, classes, schools, school boards and the province in general. Within this theme, there are two general headings:

- Assessment and Evaluation
- Reporting and Accountability

6. Strengthening Partnerships— 2005–06 Education Funding Allocation $0.2 Million

Strengthening Partnerships recognizes that public education is a shared responsibility between government, schools, parents, teachers, students, the community, and many other education partners and that success will only be achieved by working together. The two categories of partnerships are:

- Direct School-Community Partnerships
- Value-adding Outside Partnerships

New Provincial Education Funding Totals $21.4 Million for 2005–06

The foregoing provincial funding totals $21.4 million. This does not include $5.030 million in previously-committed funding for the final year of *Learning for Life*. In addition to the $21.4 million in new funding, Health Promotion holds about $1.7 million intended for grants to school boards for the overall healthy foods initiative in schools, or for physical activity-related matters like equipment, or for necessary research on physical activities. These funds will be allocated in collaboration with the Department of Education, with criteria similar to current Department of Education practices.

Brighter Futures Together outlines long-term commitments that will take many years to fulfill. Results will not be evident for some time; however, this is a solid plan based on what we have learned through consultations with our education partners. We are confident that by working together, with student success as everyone's first priority, we will improve the public education system in Nova Scotia.

Introduction

Since 1999, parents, teachers, school board members, students, and taxpayers have had many opportunities to express their views about education. In September 2002, having heard those views, the Ministry of Education released a new plan, *Learning for Life*. It set in motion a new direction for education in Nova Scotia. It established a solid foundation for student learning, particularly in the early years, with more support in reading, writing, and math for both students and teachers. There was also more emphasis on helping all students to succeed, and on the importance of informed, involved parents. The plan also emphasized safer and healthier environments for learning, and greater financial accountability. With two years of the plan now in place, parents, students, and teachers, and many other education partners agree: the road map outlined in *Learning for Life* has taken education in the right direction.

In 2003, the provincial government introduced its *Blueprint for building a better Nova Scotia*, which made a number of commitments to expand on *Learning for Life*. These commitments formed the starting point for *Learning for Life II: Brighter Futures Together.*

Before finalizing the new plan, the Department of Education also looked at lessons learned, areas still needing attention, and ways that partners could best support student success. We consulted with a broad cross-section of education partners at our first Education Partners' Forum in early 2005. The input received has been instrumental in helping to shape the way forward. The Department of Education will work to continue offering appropriate opportunities for partners to make suggestions and have input as time goes on.

Government has committed $21.4 million to the Department of Education to implement the first year of this four year plan. This figure does not include $5.030 million in previously-committed funding for the final year of *Learning for Life*. An additional $1.7 million has been allocated to Health Promotion for initiatives that are integral to the plan. Decisions about financial commitments to future years will be made each year.

Annual Updates

Partners can expect to see annual updates to this plan, with information on what has been achieved and plans for the coming year, each spring.

Major Themes

1. Raising the Bar

Setting higher standards for learning and teaching, and raising expectations for increased achievement for all students involves recognizing achievements both in and out of school that contribute to a student's education. The goal is that every student in Nova Scotia's public education system reaches his or her fullest potential.

Whole School Improvement

Whole school improvement is a process that enables schools to significantly improve student and school performance. The department has piloted the process in 16 schools over the past two years, and all those involved said the School Improvement Planning and Accreditation process is one of the most powerful tools they have used for improving school and student performance. The process works by first having schools identify areas needing improvement. Then a plan is drafted to address these areas. An external team reviews the plan before it is implemented. After three years, the external team returns to assess the school's progress in achieving its goals. If there has been significant progress, the school is accredited.

Principals as Educational Leaders

In order for this process to succeed, it is essential that principals can demonstrate educational leadership. However, many principals have said they struggle to fulfil this role. Where principals are able to focus on education, the impact on student achievement is clear. Part of the principal's role as educational leader is to work with classroom teachers to help them improve their teaching. A structured process for those discussions will be introduced to support this work.

Well-prepared Teachers

In addition to guidance and support from principals, teachers also need to be well-prepared during their teacher training to have more than just the specific background needed to teach their assigned classes; they need to be prepared for the many challenges of the modern classroom.

Improvements in Curriculum and Programs

"The emphasis on school improvement is a stellar idea that must be implemented to benefit the next generation of young scholars."
- Education Partner

Learning for Life established mathematics and language arts as curriculum priorities. This theme builds on that work. We will continue to support new, high quality curriculum delivery. There will be new mathematics learning resources in grades P–9. The language arts reading and writing programs introduced for grades P–6 will be expanded to higher grades, including high school. For both mathematics and language arts, we will move toward full-time mentors supporting all P–9 schools. These mentors will help teachers plan and deliver programs. In addition, a million more books will be placed in classrooms to support curriculum, and more money will be committed to increase the existing textbook credit allocation to school boards.

A Million More Books

The federal government has announced its goal of having 50 per cent of secondary school graduates with a functional knowledge of French by 2013. Nova Scotia's own goal is to double the proportion (from the present 23 per cent) of students who graduate with this functional knowledge.

The French Second Language (FSL) program includes Immersion, Core French, and Extended Core French and encompasses the full range of the Public School Program. Nova Scotia has a five year plan that addresses resources, qualifications of teachers, and improvements to program effectiveness. It also addresses accessibility so more students can access FSL programs and continue learning French through high school. These projects can also influence concerns identified elsewhere in the plan, as they relate to French language programs, school libraries, support for language arts literacy, and more effective use of instructional time.

Nova Scotia already offers advanced mathematics and science courses as part of the Public School Program. The number and variety of advanced courses will be increased, and students and parents will be made aware of these options. Online access will also be expanded over time, to give more students the opportunity to take advanced courses. Several schools offer provincial or locally developed advanced courses and support for students who wish to write Advanced Placement Examinations. Opportunities and supports to write these examinations will be increased. The International Baccalaureate (IB) program is offered in two high schools in the province. This program will be expanded in future so that every school board has the opportunity to offer Grade 11 and 12 IB courses in at least one high school in their jurisdiction.

Blueprint Commitments Addressed by Raising the Bar

Learning for Life II: Brighter Futures Together addressed more than forty commitments made in government's *Blueprint*. A complete list is included as Appendix A. The commitments addressed by this theme are:

144	Expand the range of advanced high school in-class and distance education courses to include language arts, social sciences, and the arts.
147	Establish a province-wide School Accreditation Program with public reporting. Schools that need assistance will be provided with targeted resources, through the school advisory council, to support the school's improvement plan.
149	Initiate structural, administrative, and accountability changes, in consultation with teachers, school boards, and parent groups, to improve student results.
151	Continue to expand professional development opportunities for teachers in priority areas such as math and language arts.
152	Audit teachers teaching out of their field of study. Work with school boards, NSTU, and universities to identify strategies to better match teachers to their subject specialties.

Initiative	Plan for 2005–06	Subsequent Years '06–07 to '08–09
School Improvement Planning and Accreditation to be in place in all schools over five years	$240,000 • Pilot sites continue implementing plans • School boards identify 50 more schools • Each school to receive $5,000 + $5/student over 2 years (was $4,500 + $4/student)	Review and refine resources and supports, build school and school board capacity More schools yearly over five years
With school board structures now focussed on schools, clarify principal's role and support them to be educational leaders	$67,000 • Principals' conferences to share ideas and good practices • With principals, identify criteria for success, current barriers, and clarify role • Plan pilot projects for 2006–07 to test theories, expand good practices	Additional pilots in 2006–07 Assess results and recommend practices that yield most benefit
New teacher professional growth planning, in the context of school improvement planning, to help teachers support their school's goals, and help improve student achievement	$50,000 • In collaboration, plan/develop/introduce a framework for a growth planning process • Identify pilot sites, funding requirements for 2006–07	Pilot the framework in 2006–07, assess results, link to improvement planning as it is put in place in more schools
Review correlation between teacher assignment and university preparation, review teacher programming, and make a plan to address issues	$50,000 • Review teacher education programming • Recommend changes and a plan to address identified issues	With partners, consider recommendations, plan for changes that can be made in 2006–07 and future years

Initiative	Plan for 2005–06	Subsequent Years '06–07 to '08–09
More resources and supports for mathematics	$1,820,000 • New books and resources, grades 4 and 9 • Implement Math Essentials 10, pilot Math Essentials 11 • PD for every 10–12 mathematics teacher • Mathematics: Home-School Communication box • 7.0 FTE mathematics mentors serving P–9	Learning resources for P–9; up to 50 more mentors as resources allow; more homework support and online resources
More resources and supports for language arts	$1,240,000 • Writing support/curriculum P–3, 4–6, 7, 10 • Reading support/curriculum 4–6, 7–9 • New 220-hour English 10 Plus course • Additional textbooks and resources for teachers, purchased by the department for schools • Language Arts: Home-School Communication box • 7.0 FTE language arts mentors serving P–9	Expansion of reading and writing programs, up to 40 more mentors as resources allow
For French Second Language, introduce a range of projects to add resources, qualified teachers and alternate program delivery to double the proportion of graduates functional in French by 2013	$640,000 • Needs assessment regarding gaps in curriculum, libraries, classrooms, and learning resources • Options to add qualifications (bursaries, immersion, mentorships) • Pilot alternate delivery, Core French • Provide more learning resources in French	Address identified gaps, develop resources; monitor students' progress in alternate program delivery modes; expand student competency assessments, as resources allow
Expand advanced program options for students who want them, and make more courses available online to increase access	$225,000 • Prepare for IB launch in 2006–07 • Develop Advanced Chemistry 11, English 11, Music 12, Visual Arts 12, Chemistry 12, Global Geography 12, Global History 12 • Pilot Advanced Music 11, Visual Arts 11, Physics 11, Physics 12 • More courses online	Implement IB program in new sites; continue developing new courses and supports, and making up to five more courses available online each year, as resources allow

"We must test students to see where they are, then we must use the information to improve schools so that students have excellent learning environments."

- Forum Participant

2. Closing the Gap

Some students are not succeeding in the existing public school system and need additional or different supports. The goal is to help each student achieve success. In many instances this will require the contribution and support of a number of partners.

Programs to Help More Students to Succeed

Some students are not succeeding at the high school level, or are not engaged in their education. Programs have been piloted to help them succeed and keep students in school until graduation. Additional options are needed so that all students can move into meaningful work or post secondary education.

Options and Opportunities

A package of programming, to be called *Options and Opportunities* (or O_2), that will better ensure these students' needs are met, is now being developed. Components will include community learning partnerships, integrated career education and planning, workplace skills, family connections, a head start in trades, among others. Ongoing collaboration with education and community partners will be a key success factor. For example, the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) will guarantee seats for successful students in appropriate programs. The Department of Education's Skills and Learning Branch will develop more career information resources to help students and their parents to prepare for the future.

Youth Pathways and Transitions

The successful Youth Pathways and Transitions strategy will continue. This strategy targets career-focussed students in high school, with direct linkages for credit between certain high school courses and NSCC programs. It ensures students have career portfolios, which research has shown greatly enhance students' capacity to demonstrate their skills, knowledge, and experiences to employers.

"I recently completed a Master's course in literacy and much of the principles we have read and learned about were nicely incorporated into this plan."

- Teacher

For students to succeed in life after graduation, they must meet certain standards of literacy. The elementary literacy assessment first introduced in 2003 identified students not meeting expectations in reading and writing. In early 2004, the first individual student results were released to schools and parents. Teachers received guidelines and help so they could plan literacy support plans to help these students, starting in grade 7. These supports will continue until Grade 9, when students will be reassessed. This help will continue until students do meet expectations.

"Congratulations for striving for improvements and focusing on student needs."
- Forum Participant

As the language arts literacy assessment is expanded to grades 3 and 9 (for more details, see *Measuring and Reporting on Success*), teacher supports will also be expanded, similar to those already in place for the elementary language arts literacy assessment. The department will monitor and support schools' results, and offer assistance relating to literacy support.

A similar approach is planned to support a mathematics assessment for grades 3, 6, and 9. In addition, supports for grades P–2 will help prepare students to succeed in the assessment process when they encounter it in grade 3.

African Nova Scotian Learners

The 1994 *Black Learners Advisory Committee Report on Education (BLAC Report)* made recommendations for the education system to become more equitable and accessible to African Nova Scotian learners. Many of the recommendations have already been implemented, and over the coming four years, the operational aspects of the remaining recommendations will be addressed. These include programming across the curriculum to reflect the needs of a diverse student population; youth leadership and development programs for African Nova Scotian children and youth; establishing scholarships and awards for post-secondary education, and a Transition Year Program at the Nova Scotia Community College. Funding will be increased for adult upgrading, life skills and job related training; and for ongoing research to enable the African Nova Scotian community to more effectively contribute to a renewed education system.

First Nations Learners

The 1996 *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, the 2002 CTF *Symposium Report on Aboriginal Issues in Education*, and the 2004 *Prime Minister's Report on the Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable: Strengthening the Relationship*, have all consistently said that we must improve education outcomes for Aboriginal children and youth. The educational experiences and needs of First Nations learners who are predominantly Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia's public school system will be examined. Best practices at demonstration sites,

Home-School Liaison Workers

and the impact of home-school liaison workers will be studied. The results of those studies will enable the partners to collaboratively plan next steps. As well, it is recognized that if knowledge of the language of a community or people is eroded, the culture from which it sprang is also eroded. To overcome this, education resources to support the junior high Mi'kmaw

Mi'kmaw Language Curriculum

language curriculum will be developed, piloted, and implemented.

Growing numbers of students come from homes where languages other than English are spoken. These students need help to acquire sufficient reading and writing skills in the English language to succeed academically. While there is no education funding specifically targeted for ESL instruction, the

new Office of Immigration will start providing some funding to school boards for ESL instruction where it is needed, starting in 2005–06. ESL guidelines and testing tools have been developed by the Department of Education, but have not been implemented yet. Funding will be made available to help support school boards to implement these guidelines and testing tools, so they can help students meet reading and writing expectations, and stay in school.

ESL Guidelines and Testing Tools

The department's Skills and Learning Branch has supported community literacy development for some time. This will continue. Partnerships will be expanded in the field of family and parent–child literacy through pilot initiatives linked to schools. Parents who are comfortable reading to their children, and who read for both learning and for enjoyment themselves, can more strongly support their children by encouraging a love of reading.

Parent–Child Literacy

Special Education

The 2001 *Special Education Implementation Review Committee Report* included 34 recommendations, and their implementation started as part of *Learning for Life*. This implementation will conclude over the coming five years. These recommendations include funding to enable school boards and the department provide resources and related professional development to enhance opportunities for students with special needs, and to enhance communications with parents of students with special needs, such as conferences, handbooks, fact sheets, and other materials; and creating more supports for teachers who work with the students and parents.

Pilot projects through *Learning for Life* over the past two years have studied ways to address difficult student services issues, including behaviour issues, and many best practices have been identified. The *Learning for Life* commitment will be completed in 2005–06, and a new Innovation Challenge Fund will be established so that school boards can apply these best practices, or expand their existing services.

New Innovation Challenge Fund

Reading Recovery™ is an intensive program specially designed to help those children in the lowest-achieving 20 per cent of grade 1 readers and writers. It has been shown to help students keep reading and writing and, therefore, learning. Targeted funding is advancing full implementation in English grade 1 classrooms by 2005–06, and will be maintained in future years to ensure students have good reading skills from the start. Overall Reading Recovery program quality will be improved, and a training program will continue, to sustain an adequate supply of teachers. Also, Reading Recovery will be

Reading Recovery Program Quality

extended to students in French Immersion classes. This will start after French-speaking teachers are trained in the program and know how to administer the Observation Survey which assesses students' reading and writing abilities.

Lending Libraries for Assistive Technology Resources

Students with special needs may benefit from technological devices and software so they can participate fully in their education. These devices and software are commonly referred to as assistive technology. Examples include voice-recognition software, special keyboards, or touch-screen technology. Some school boards are further ahead than others in this field; however all need access to these resources.

Funding will be made available to establish lending libraries for assistive technology resources across Nova Scotia.

A new *Tuition Support Program* was established in 2004–05. We believe school boards can meet the needs of all students, but the new program provides alternatives for some students. Parents of students with an Individual Program Plan (IPP) who so prefer may apply for tuition assistance equal to per-student funding their board receives. There are clear criteria for approvals, and funding is for a maximum of two years, because it is expected that the child would then be able to return to public school in that time. It is anticipated the Tuition Support Program will be assessed in 2008–09, to determine any changes in structure or program delivery that may be beneficial.

Teacher Assistant Qualifications

The numbers of teacher assistants has increased annually since the mid-1990s. Teacher assistants are valuable resources for classrooms, when used in conjunction with trained teachers, resource teachers, and other special education professionals. Guidelines introduced in 1998 set out the minimum educational and skills qualifications for all teacher assistants. A 2002 survey showed that most teacher assistants met the guidelines. During the 2005–06 school year, school boards will verify that all current teacher assistants do meet the guidelines, and that these minimums will be the standard used by each school board when hiring all new teacher assistants.

Supports for Education

The *Racial Equity Policy* was developed in 2002 as a response to various issues brought into particular focus by the *BLAC Report* and the *Report of the Task Force on Mi'kmaq Education*. This policy was implemented at the elementary level in the 2004–05 school year. It will now be extended into the secondary school levels through professional development in-servicing, and conferences.

Bring the *Racial Equity Policy* to Life

Schools will be able to bring the *Racial Equity Policy* to life by sharing their experiences, monitoring indicators of success, evaluating what has changed as a result of the policy, and planning for continual improvement.

Several years ago, the province set an on-average target of one computer for every five students in public schools. This was achieved, and a new Technology Refresh program to replace older classroom computers, software, and accessories, was recently introduced for junior high grades, where the oldest resources currently reside. Grade 7 is now complete, and other grades will be refreshed over the life of the plan.

Classroom technology best supports student learning when it is integrated into instruction. Certain conditions are required for this to be effective. First, teachers must be able to use technology. Second, technician support for classrooms must be readily available. To improve these conditions, funding will be provided for additional technicians to enhance classroom and school technology support. More professional development to help teachers integrate technology into their instruction will also be provided.

"Distance Education is especially important for rural areas."
- Education Partner

Some school boards offer courses online, particularly to those students in small rural schools. The department will supplement those activities by funding a pilot project for designated rural schools in 2005–06, to offer access to specialized high school courses that may be difficult to offer in such locations otherwise.

More Books and Resources

The Department of Education will purchase more textbooks for students, and resources for teachers, to be provided directly to schools. This is in addition to increasing the existing Textbook Credit Allocation, starting in 2005–06. The Allocation is a per-student allowance given to school boards as part of their annual funding. School boards use it to purchase books and other resources from the Authorized Learning Resources list. The allocation has not been increased in several years. With the increase, students will be provided with more of the books and resources they need to succeed.

"More definite planning for the enrichment of school libraries. Most theme areas have direct connections to the school library which, when adequately funded and staffed, increases levels of student achievement, both in the classroom and out."

-Education Partner

It is proposed that funds be made available for school libraries over the coming few years. These funds will be used to purchase more books and other resources that best complement each school's programs and the classroom resources the department already provides to schools. Funds will also be used to help improve the ratio of school library technician staff to students, so that both students and teachers have greater access to school library facilities and help.

Blueprint Commitments Addressed by Closing the Gap

Learning for Life II: Brighter Futures Together addresses more than forty commitments made in government's *Blueprint*. A complete list is included as Appendix A. The commitments addressed by this theme are:

77	Train an additional 88 medical lab technologists, over the next four years, providing bursaries for those who agree to work in Nova Scotia (link to *Pathways* initiative).
137	Provide students with at least one million more books, math tools, learnware packages, and teaching resources (by year 4).
139	Use individualized test results (reading and math) and teacher assessments to identify struggling students; provide intervention and support in junior high to achieve better learning outcomes.
141	Complete the *Learning for Life* plan for students with special needs, including more professionals, assistive technology, Reading Recovery available to all Grade 1 classes, and individualized support for students.
142	Develop and fund a new tuition support program for special needs students and individual program plans. The program will include a faster appeal process, an ombudsman for students with special needs who will have authority to recommend options, providing funding to parents for students with IPPs attending private schools. Additional support could be offered to low-income families so ability to pay is not a barrier. As well, accountability agreements would be required with private schools.
143	Standards for all new teacher assistants and professional development for existing teacher assistants so their skills meet the needs of the children they support.
145	Add resources to support the long-term viability of isolated rural schools, including establishing minimum standards for delivering classroom and distance education.
154	Implement the recommendations of the Provincial Student Education Council report on bullying, including providing province-wide training sessions for teachers.
185	Implement the operational recommendations outlined in the *BLAC Report*.

Initiative	Plan for 2005–06	Subsequent Years '06–07 to '08–09
A new Options and Opportunities (O_2) package will be developed, with links to education partners and communities, and including increasing learning success, and youth apprenticeship, so students stay in school until they graduate	**$1,518,000 ($728K, $390K, $400K)** • Introduce first O_2 program components; develop others • Expand youth apprenticeship opportunities • Launch Student Life/Work Portfolio, grade 7 • Grants to school boards to increase capacity to meet student needs, increase learning success	Continue developing program components, building community partnerships; evaluate impact on successful school completion rates
Youth Pathways and Transition will be continued, and more courses and resources added	**$370,000** • Introduce Geomatics 12, Tourism 12; pilot Health and Human Services 12 • Implement Computer Programming 12	Continue developing and introducing programs to meet identified needs
The literacy support strategy will be expanded to grades 3, 6, and 9 and interventions will be co-ordinated and monitored	**$902,000** • Literacy Support Plans (LSPs) will be developed • Continue supports to grade 7–8 students who did not meet elementary literacy expectations • Prepare supports for grades 4, 5, and 6, to coincide with new grade 3 literacy assessment, similar to those in place for grade 7 students	All students on LSPs supported and monitored Introduce new support to early grades after grade 3 assessment introduced
New mathematics support strategy, aligned with new mathematics assessments	**$0** • Establish mathematics literacy assessment advisory committees • Develop and field test assessment tasks for P–2 and grade 3 • Publish administration guidelines	Students on Mathematics Support Plans (MSPs) supported and monitored Develop strategy and resources for supports, anticipated to start in 2007–08
Supporting African Nova Scotian learners through continued implementation of *BLAC Report*	**$969,000** • Fund 8 FTE student support workers • Prepare for NSCC Transition Year Program • Expand post-secondary scholarships/ awards • New youth leadership development, parent outreach and adult education programming • Continue curriculum development • Fund research by Africentric Learning Institute	Continue and conclude implementation of *BLAC Report* recommendations as resources permit

Initiative	Plan for 2005–06	Subsequent Years '06–07 to '08–09
Supporting Mi'kmaw learners by studying educational experience, piloting home-school liaison workers, developing resources to support Mi'kmaw language programming for junior high	$105,000 • Research and plan for educational study and home-school liaison worker program, select study sites • Develop resources for grade 7 curriculum • Revise grade 8 curriculum	Complete grade 9 curriculum; develop resources for 8 and 9; select sites for home school liaison worker pilots; develop parent resources; evaluate studies when completed
Support to school boards for ESL students so they can stay in school	$100,000 • Grants to school boards so they can implement existing ESL resources to help students meet language arts expectations, and stay in school	Continue supports, and in time, evaluate impact of program
Expand partnerships in the field of parent–child literacy to help all parents support their children in learning to read	$50,000 • With Family Literacy Advisory Group, continue raising public awareness of existing programs • Pilots for parents with limited literacy skills	Continue focus on parents with limited literacy skills, continue raising awareness
Continue implementing *SEIRC Report* recommendations including professionals, resources, communications with parents	$630,000 • Continue adding special education professionals • Add tools for communication with parents	Continue until the Minister's Response to SEIRC has been completely implemented
Develop training for teachers to enhance capacity to work with students with autism spectrum disorder	$380,000 • With school boards and Dalhousie University, conduct research, consult with other jurisdictions, to develop training to address areas of need • Start delivering professional development	Continue delivering training, add training modules where needed based on experience and continued research
After pilots completed, establish a new Innovation Challenge Fund to enable school boards to apply best practices for difficult student services issues, studied over the last two years	$0 • Provide grants to school boards so they can complete pilots as the basis for expanding successful practices to more schools	Establish new fund, continue monitoring, evaluating, and refining best practices
Sustain and improve the quality of the Reading Recovery program and extend to French Immersion	$236,000 • Extend program to all English grade 1 classes • Start review of program quality, including training to sustain supply of qualified teachers • Based on research, prepare for extension of program to French Immersion grade 1 classes	Continue training, implement quality and other improvements; implement program for French Immersion

Initiative	Plan for 2005–06	Subsequent Years '06–07 to '08–09
Expand access to assistive technology resources to all school boards	$200,000 • Provide funds, guidance to school boards so each region has access to resources/services	Monitor implementation, provide additional guidance as required
Continue the Tuition Support Program introduced in 2004, and assess after sufficient experience	$200,000 • Continue administering program introduced in 2004–05 school year • Monitor program delivery by approved special education private schools	Continue monitoring and take necessary actions; evaluate in 2008–09
All teacher assistants to meet minimum qualifications as set out in *Teacher Assistant Guidelines*	$0 • School boards to verify that all current teacher assistants meet minimum qualifications • Uniform qualifications guidelines for hiring all new teacher assistants	Continue requiring that all teacher assistants meet minimum qualifications
Continue Racial Equity Policy implementation in secondary grades, with schools monitoring success and planning improvements	$100,000 • Implement in some secondary grade levels • Continue to support elementary, where policy is already implemented	Continue implementation until all grades and schools are completed Monitor and evaluate effectiveness over time
Refresh technology in classrooms starting in junior high school, and support its use in classrooms by adding technological support and professional development; increase on-line courses' access	$1,580,000 • Refresh computers/equipment–grade 8 • Fund 50 online course seats for students in small rural high schools • Develop 3 new online courses • Add funding for 1,000 more days of teacher PD • Add funding for 10 FTE technicians for schools	Extend refresh to other grades, starting with grade 9, continue adding funding for PD and for technicians
Provide more textbooks to students, in addition to the increased Textbook Credit Allocation	$1,000,000 Provide textbooks direct to schools, for core program areas to meet needs identified by department	Continue textbook provision as resources permit, based on identified needs
Support improvements for school libraries	$570,000 • Grants to school boards to refresh school library resources • Develop guidelines, standards, resource lists for school libraries	Implement guidelines and standards, support school boards in making quality improvement, address access to school library services via staffing improvement

3. Developing Healthy and Active Learners

Schools have a role to play in promoting healthy, active living for students. The goal is that, with the co-operation of partners and schools, and by making many individual changes over time, students will be better, more engaged learners at school, and healthier Nova Scotians for life.

Two Funding Partners

Initiatives within this theme are being supported by two funding partners—the Department of Education, and Health Promotion within the Department of Health. In this section, all areas are described, to give a complete picture of what is intended to occur. However, each partner has direct budgetary responsibility for specific initiatives. As noted elsewhere, for 2005–06, Education's allocation is about $1.8 million, and Health Promotion's allocation is about $1.7 million. Each partner is accountable for those specific initiatives that are within their direct budgetary allocation.

Health Education, Physical Education and Student Leadership

"Healthy children learn better—don't lose that."
- Forum Participant

A healthy, active child becomes a healthy, active adult, especially if that healthy lifestyle is modelled and encouraged at school.

There is already a comprehensive portfolio of health education, and physical education, programs. As part of its 2002 *Time to Learn Strategy*, the Department of Education recommended minimum times for daily physical education and activity. To support the government's goal of healthier students in schools, new and comprehensive health education programming will be developed and implemented for grades P–9. This will include nutrition, safety, addictions prevention, mental health, anti-bullying, and healthy sexuality. New Family Studies, and Health and Human Services courses and textbooks are proposed, as are pamphlets on health-related career opportunities, healthy food choices, and physical activity.

Comprehensive Health Education Programming

Support will be increased so that physical education programs in grades P–9 can be more effectively implemented. New physical education programs will be introduced for grades 10–12. To help school boards meet minimum times specified by the Department of Education for daily physical education and instruction, additional qualified physical education teachers will be added over time, particularly in grades 3–6. Through grants from Health Promotion, physical education instructional equipment will be refreshed.

Additional Qualified Physical Education Teachers

Leadership will be provided to help schools increase and improve the healthy lifestyles they model for students. A new provincial co-ordinator (cost-shared

between the Department of Education and Health Promotion) and consultants at school boards will together ensure the comprehensive package of curriculum, resources, and programs is implemented.

"[It was] wonderful to see such a holistic view of learning, as well as a willingness to identify and challenge systemic issues."

– Forum Participant

One goal is a 10-point improvement in rates of physical activity for all physically inactive children by 2010, with an emphasis on girls and young women. Physical activity levels tend to decline in this group as they get older. This issue will be addressed with resource materials for teachers and parents. Health Promotion will match funding up to $15,000 per school so that schools can refurbish playground equipment. This will provide students with more places where they can be physically active. The new Community Use of Schools Policy will be implemented. This supports community health improvement by allowing greater access to school facilities for physical activity.

Health Promotion has announced its intention to develop more youth physical activity and leadership skill development programs. The public school system will work to complement those new programs so that students have more opportunities to participate in individual and school leadership programs. The system will also help with the recognition of individual and school commitment and achievement.

Healthy Foods in Schools

Children and youth need healthy foods if they are to learn, grow, develop, and become healthy adults. Schools can help children by teaching them to make healthy food choices, by ensuring that foods in schools are safe, healthy, and nutritious, and by choosing fund-raising methods that model a commitment to healthy food choices.

Working with partners, a new Healthy Foods in Schools policy will be developed to guide schools, students, and parents to meet these challenges. Additional financial support for equipment (such as refrigerators) was started in early 2005. Regular inspections by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries will help ensure ongoing food safety. The Department of Education, along with the Office of Economic Development will help school boards make best use of funds by developing contracts with Nova Scotia companies for healthy foods that are locally produced. The policy will also include research on alternatives for fund-raising to support the transition to healthy food choices.

"The collaboration between Education and Health is a strength."
- Education Partner

Students who start their day with a nutritious breakfast are more attentive and better able to learn. There are many successful school-based breakfast programs already in place. These will provide useful experiences to guide an expanded breakfast program plan. The Department of Education will work with Health Promotion and other partners to increase support for school-based breakfast programs province wide, starting with elementary grades. Provincial standards will be developed, in collaboration with partners, to ensure food quality is consistent, and partners will help support school boards in working toward them.

Safe Schools

The *Provincial School Code of Conduct* was introduced in 2002. New *School Code of Conduct Guidelines* are being implemented in schools to ensure they are caring, safe, and positive environments that support the best possible learning conditions. Training in Positive Effective Behavioural Supports started in March 2005 and will be extended over three years to all schools. A database will be established to track and monitor student behavioural incidents, to support decision-making and development of strategies to maintain positive behaviours and safer schools.

Strategies to Maintain Positive Behaviours

Some schools with students in grades 7–12 have Youth Health Centres either in the school, or accessible to students during the school day. The availability of these centres will be increased. Education and Health Promotion will work together to identify spaces and necessary resources. Through an allocation in Health Promotion's budget, school boards will make necessary renovations for the spaces, and Health partners will provide staff for the new centres.

Blueprint Commitments Addressed by Developing Healthy and Active Learners

Learning for Life II—Brighter Futures Together addresses more than forty commitments made in government's *Blueprint*. A complete list is included as Appendix A. The commitments addressed by this theme are:

61	Help Nova Scotia producers maximize their market share by increasing awareness of Nova Scotia-grown agricultural products as part of Brand Nova Scotia.
91	Aggressively promote "Knowledge is the Best Medicine," an education campaign designed to prevent the over-use or mis-use of prescription drugs (this topic is included in the grades primary–6 and 8 health education curriculum).
102	Continue to work on an evidence-based strategy to reduce Nova Scotia's high rates of chronic disease. Nova Scotia's Chronic Disease Prevention Plan will include a comprehensive, multi-year approach that includes targets and time lines.
105	Implement and fund the next steps outlined in Active Kids/Healthy Kids, Nova Scotia's physical activity strategy for children and youth.
106	Dedicate additional resources to support Esteem Team: Nova Scotia athletes go to schools to speak of the value and benefits of sport and healthy living.
108	Ensure our publicly owned schools are made available to support free after-school physical activities for youth. (Education as lead, Office of Health Promotion as partner).
109	Minimum 6 hours after-class time for community groups encouraging physical activity.
111	Dedicate resource within the Office of Health Promotion, the Youth Secretariat, and the Senior Citizen's Secretariat to identify and implement new community-based approaches that encourage healthy living among the young and old.
112	Work with school boards to implement healthy eating policies as part of the healthy eating strategy for Nova Scotia; *Our Healthy School* in all elementary schools by year 4.
113	Increase the number of Teen Health Centres throughout the province.
116	Create Nova Scotia's first School and Workplace Health Champions Award. Winning strategies for promoting good health will be publicized and provided with a financial reward to be used to support ongoing healthy school and workplace initiatives.
117	Work with the Department of Education, NSTU, and school boards to expand health curriculum professional development opportunities.
118	Introduce additional anti-smoking programs in schools and workplaces, including "You Choose" in schools (students determine anti-smoking ads).
119	Continue to fund Nova Scotia's Comprehensive Tobacco Control Strategy with a commitment to use a portion of additional revenue from future tobacco tax revenues to support anti-smoking programs and supports (Education confirmed as partner).
121	Develop a health information referral service and interactive website to respond to information requests on government and non-government (e.g., Health Charities Network, Sport Nova Scotia) health programs, services and information.
122	Maximize the value of Nova Scotia's public health professionals (public health nurses, addictions counsellors, paramedics, nutritionists, etc.) by examining new opportunities for their involvement in schools and Family Resource Centres.

Major Themes: 3. Developing Healthy and Active Learners

Initiative	Plan for 2005–06	Subsequent Years '06–07 to '08–09
New health education and physical education programs to build on what is already in place	$673,000 • Develop programs for grades P–3 and implement for grades 4–6 • Introduce Health/PDR, develop Physically Active Lifestyles 11, Physical Education Leadership 12 • Parent pamphlets on health education programs • Start adding qualified physical education teachers	Implement curriculum and resources as they are developed Add teachers each year as resources allow
School system to support programs to improve students' lifestyles at school, and children and youth physical activity levels	$859,000 • Cost-share provincial co-ordinator • Grants to school boards to hire consultants at each board to implement programming • Implement Community Use of Schools Framework	Continue implementation
Gender issues and physical activity—help girls/young women sustain activity levels; targeted at grades 5 to 9	$83,000 • Learning resources, awareness professional development, information for parents/SACs	Monitor effectiveness of actions, intervene as results indicate are necessary
Continue existing public school leadership programs; support OHP programs, by ensuring students can take part; help recognize school and individual achievement; develop criteria for credits for non-classroom activities that have educational value	$30,000 • Promote Duke of Edinburgh Awards, peer activities, volunteering, service learning, other leadership development programs	Continue support to expand participation, school wide enrichment programs; consider more challenges for credit; other supports of OHP initiatives, as resources allow
Develop, with partners, a new Healthy Foods in Schools policy, and help school boards cost-effectively implement it; develop healthier alternatives for school fund-raising	OHP Budget • Draft policy for consultation, spring 2005 • Begin phased-in implementation of policy	Complete introduction of policy
Support for expanded breakfast programs in schools, including provincial quality standards	OHP Budget • Build support for expanded program • Start extending to more elementary schools • Develop provincial quality standards	Continue building support, adding schools and supporting schools to work toward standards of quality
Ensure schools are safer by introducing Positive Effective Behavioural Supports to all schools, and by tracking behaviour incidents to plan future improvements	$155,000 • Now implemented in 100 schools; add up to 100 more • Start school board leadership training • Schools start tracking behavioural incidents	Continue implementation until all schools in place; use data for decision making, address severe behavioural challenges
Provide physical spaces for more Youth Health Centres for students in grades 7–12, to be staffed by Health partners	OHP Budget • Identify suitable spaces; school boards to renovate as required • Health partners to provide staff for centres	Continue identifying and opening health centres, as resources allow

4. Providing Time to Teach and Time to Learn

Today's youth need to know much more than ever before if they are to participate fully in a global society. We can help by preparing them to be ready to learn from the first day they enter school, and by ensuring they have smaller class sizes in the early years so children have the attention they need from their teachers to get students started right. By taking a fresh look at the structure and use of instructional time, we can ensure students have the time they need to learn, and teachers have more time to teach.

GET STUDENTS STARTED RIGHT

Time on Task

"Need to focus on the quality of instructional time, not only the quantity."
- Forum Participant

Minimum amounts of time per day have already been set for mathematics, language arts, French, and physical education. This means there could be less time for instruction in other important areas. While regulations permit up to six hours of instruction for most grades each day, few schools provide that. School boards already limit non-instructional interruptions; however, more time is still needed. In consultation with education partners, ways will be identified to alleviate the pressures on school schedules and to find more instructional time. Results will be monitored, to ensure students have the time they need to succeed in their education.

Students who have opportunities to adapt to social settings and get accustomed to structured programs enter grade primary better prepared to learn. Government's 2003 *Blueprint for building a better Nova Scotia* committed to pilot a new, free pre-primary program starting in 2005. Issues or concerns to be addressed include roles and evaluation criteria.

"I believe the pre-primary initiative could be a watershed moment in the history of early childhood education in Nova Scotia."
- Education Partner

As many as 20 pre-primary sites will be initiated during the 2005–06 school year in areas where access to day care is limited and where school space is available. The curriculum will be based on early childhood development principles and will emphasize activities and socialization skills.

Smaller Class Sizes

The first *Learning for Life* plan committed to capping class sizes at 25 in grades P–2. This commitment will be completed in 2005. To fulfil *Blueprint* commitments, more class size reductions will be made over the next three years. For example, in 2005, combined P–1 classes will be reduced to 20 students, or another non-teaching adult could be added. This will be extended in 2006 to combined 1–2 and 2–3 classes. Grade 3 will be capped at 25 students in 2006, as will grade 4 in 2007.

Where the composition of an individual class will have an impact on the overall classroom learning environment, funding will be available so that school boards can cap the class at 20, or add another non-teaching adult. Criteria for funding applications will have the flexibility to address student needs, the expected benefit for students, and the overall impact on classroom learning. This will start with grades primary and 1 in 2005, then grades 2 and 3 in 2006.

Blueprint Commitments Addressed by Time to Teach and Time to Learn

Learning for Life II: Brighter Futures Together addresses more than forty commitments made in government's *Blueprint*. A complete list is included as Appendix A. The commitments addressed by this theme are:

129	Pilot a new Ready to Learn voluntary, free pre-school program for 4-year-olds, developed by the departments of Community Services, Education, and Health. Curriculum will be activity-based, and emphasize socialization skills, to help children become more "ready to learn" by the time they enter school. Assessments, such as hearing and speech, will be carried out through the Ready to Learn program. The first pilots will be in areas where day care access is limited, and where school space is now available. Pilot evaluation will determine the benefits of universal availability.
132	Further reduce class sizes to provide more one-on-one teaching time.
133	Beginning in 2005, combined primary-grade 1 classes will have a maximum of 20 students, or an additional non-teaching adult in the classroom; also for primary and grade 1 classes with students with special needs who have an individual program plan.
134	In 2006, the criteria (combined classes/IPP students) for a 20 student maximum will extend to grades 1-2 and 2-3 classes.
135	In 2006, all grade 3 classes will have a maximum of 25 students.
136	In 2007, all grade 4 classes will have a maximum of 25 students.

Initiative	Plan for 2005–06	Subsequent Years '06–07 to '08–09
Ensure students have the time they need to learn, and teachers the time to teach	$0 • Require school boards to ensure best use is made of available instructional time, and to track and report on usage, and improvements	Continue this requirement, monitor improvements, collaborate with partners on additional changes needed
Pilot a new, free and voluntary pre-primary program for four-year old children	$750,000 • Pilot several models as a basis for future evaluation	Second round of pilots, same sites; evaluate impact of program on student performance in grades primary and 1
Continue with class size reduction initiatives in grades primary through 4 inclusive	$2,070,000 Cap combined P–1 at 20 (or a second non-teaching adult)	Cap grades 3 and 4 at 25, and combined classes grades 1–2 and 2–3 at 20 (or a second non-teaching adult)
Address class size issues where composition of an individual class could affect the learning environment	$1,800,000 Affected grades primary and 1 classes at 20 (or second non-teaching adult)	Extend to grades 2 and 3

"This is a more comprehensive approach to looking at students' success."

- Education Partner

5. Measuring and Reporting on Success

More and better information, better supports, sound educational decisions, and a greater focus on continuous improvement will result in improvements for students, classes, schools, school boards, and the province in general. The goal is to ensure that students know they have succeeded in school so that they can succeed in life.

Assessment and Evaluation

"We must test students to see where they are, then we must use the information to improve schools so that students have excellent learning environments."

- Forum Participant

Reliable evaluation of students' learning throughout school is critical to preparing students for success. The Atlantic Canada curriculum provides curriculum outcomes at the key stages of grades 3, 6, and 9. A language arts literacy assessment is already done in grade 6; based on results, students who do not meet expectations will receive extra assistance through junior high until they are reassessed in grade 9. External assessments provide valuable information as well. This assessment will be expanded to include grades 3 and 9. A new mathematics assessment program will be introduced for grades 3, 6, and 9, starting with grade 3.

Standards for Assessment Techniques

Teachers regularly assess students in their classrooms to gauge the effectiveness of their teaching and to see how well their students are learning. Now that we are moving to key-stage assessments, it is necessary to establish standards for assessment techniques so teachers have reliable information on which to base instructional decisions. Elementary teachers already have a classroom assessment resource to help them determine their students' reading levels. A similar resource for mathematics will be introduced.

Reporting and Accountability

The annual *Minister's Report to Parents: Student Assessment Results for Nova Scotia* has been published since 2001. It sets out provincial and school board performance in mathematics, language arts, and science on provincial, national, and international assessments conducted in the previous school year. This report will be continued and expanded to include details needed for school improvement planning, and to enable school boards to report on their own progress in support of province-wide educational priorities.

Currently, there is little information available about what graduates do after high school, so it is difficult to assess whether their education helped them to succeed, and if not, what changes are needed. A new graduate follow-up survey is proposed to gather this data, including students' perceptions of the success of the supports they received in high school.

The Education Act now requires school boards to meet education program, service, and performance standards established by the Minister. With school boards, the department will develop and oversee these standards, and enhance the links between individual initiatives and provincial priorities. These individual initiatives include school improvement planning, student assessments and school board priorities. This will help the department and school boards to share more information and best practices, collaboratively plan improvements, and celebrate successes.

New Comprehensive Information System

The core business of the public school system is education, yet there is not a comprehensive information system in place to record, track, and report on education. School improvement pilot sites report that getting reliable data is one of their biggest concerns. Student achievement can be demonstrated, but only in general terms. For example, while we know that certain student groups are likely to achieve at lower levels, we cannot pull out data on these students to help identify underlying issues and design interventions to help them improve their outcomes. It is also difficult to implement standards across the province.

In consultation with school boards and other education partners, a system would be developed over the coming few years to provide reliable, comprehensive and timely data to support school and student improvement and build a better system.

Blueprint Commitments Addressed by Measuring and Reporting on Success

Learning for Life II: Brighter Futures Together addresses more than forty commitments made in government's *Blueprint*. A complete list is included as Appendix A. The commitments addressed by this theme are:

138	Continue testing program, including a new grade 6 language arts test, where parents are provided, for the first time, with their child's individualized test results.
139	Use individualized test results and teacher assessments to identify struggling students; provide intervention and support to achieve better learning outcomes.

Initiative	Plan for 2005–06	Subsequent Years '06–07 to '08–09
Expand the language arts literacy assessment from grade 6, to grades 3 and 9, and introduce a new mathematics literacy assessment for grade 3, 6, and 9	$460,000 ($260,000 and $200,000) • Establish advisory committees for each assessment (literacy and mathematics) • Prepare and field test assessment tasks • Publish guidelines and final printed forms	Administer grades 3, 6, and 9 literacy assessment in 2006–07 Support students on literacy support plans Teachers conduct P–2 assessment tasks Administer Grade 3 assessment in 2006–07
Develop teacher classroom assessment resources and a new elementary mathematics assessment resource	$500,000 • In conjunction with other Atlantic partners, develop and distribute a P–3 classroom based math assessment resource, supported with teacher professional development	Implementation of resource
Continue and expand the *Minister's Report to Parents* to enable school boards to report progress, and to support school improvement planning	$25,000 • Develop new format to include provincial, national, and international assessment, context information on the education system; school boards' progress reports on priority initiatives	New report to be released in 2006
Introduce graduate follow-up surveys to help identify changes needed to better support high school students	$80,000 • Link survey to high school program changes so new programs' impact on students can be studied, survey to be used starting in 2006–07	Introduce survey; assess results and use to consider program changes
Develop and oversee new education program, service and performance standards	$70,000 • Develop quality monitoring and reporting framework	Ongoing
Plan, develop, and introduce a new comprehensive Student Information System to support improvement initiatives	$415,000 • Complete planning phase (initial work now in place); develop detailed requirements • Initiate procurement, and contract negotiations	Next phases include detailed planning and preparation, procurement, and implementation

6. Strengthening Partnerships for Students' Benefit

Public education is a shared responsibility, and everyone in the community and beyond needs to contribute to students' success. The goal is to achieve the best possible levels of success by working together.

Direct School–Community Partnerships

School advisory councils (SACs) were established by the Education Act in 1996, and as part of *Learning for Life*, their role has been reviewed. It has been identified that a more meaningful role for SACs would benefit students and schools.

A New Orientation Manual

To help SACs take on a stronger role, a new orientation manual will be provided that will expand on, and clarify, SAC roles as set out in the Education Act and to provide guidance on best practices around the SAC mandate. Professional development, regional conferences, and more networking opportunities will all help SACs to carry out their responsibilities as intended by the Act.

Parents Improve a School's Focus on Education

Well-informed and appropriately involved parents improve a school's focus on education because the parents' priority is to help their children succeed. Existing parent resources include pamphlets, fact sheets, guidelines, and a parent website.

More materials will be developed on how the system works, how parents can best support learning, and the roles of other education partners. Regional sessions for parents of students with special needs, and of African Nova Scotian students will be offered. The *Minister's Report to Parents* will be expanded, and the standard provincial report card will be implemented, and also expanded to include progress on Individual Program Plans.

Value-Adding Outside Partnerships

"The partnerships being promoted ... is a very positive step. Schools and teachers cannot do it alone."

- Education Partner

Community and business partnerships can help schools develop educational programs to better meet student needs and improve physical activity levels and healthy lifestyles.

School boards would examine the partnerships they now enjoy, assess their effectiveness, and identify where new or enhanced partnerships can provide more supports to help schools to meet their students' needs. Strong local partnerships not only help schools and teachers, they also strengthen students' resources throughout their communities.

"Parents are a critical part of the formula if we expect to achieve success."

– Education Partner

Strong relationships between schools and educational partners are needed to support students making transitions into or within public school, and out of high school. These relationships are strengthened by comprehensive career development information and assistance, and by working more closely with Nova Scotia Community College and universities to ensure smooth and successful transitions for all students. Programming already helps public school students consider career paths and options, and the Youth Pathways and Transitions strategy also helps students move smoothly into chosen careers. The Skills and Learning Branch of the Department of Education also develops career resources for adults of all ages, some of which are also of interest to public school students and their parents. This Branch will collaborate with the Public Schools Branch to align the career resources which are available and to develop more resources that would help students and their parents to consider all available career options.

Societal changes in the last few decades have expanded the kinds of issues that public schools must address to help their students succeed. At the same time, students need to know and be able to do much, much more by the time they leave high school, if they are to make a successful transition to work or further education. Schools can no longer "do it all" alone. For many years, government has had an inter-departmental collaboration through the Children and Youth Action Committee; however this does not focus on program-specific collaboration that could occur.

Collaborative Government Partnerships

The Departments of Health including Health Promotion, Education, and Agriculture and Fisheries, and the Office of Economic Development have identified the need for closer, more collaborative government partnerships and these are proposed to be further developed in the coming few years. More linkages will be developed over time with other departments, including Community Services, Justice, and others.

Blueprint Commitments Addressed by Strengthening Partnerships

Learning for Life II: Brighter Futures Together addresses more than forty commitments made in government's *Blueprint*. A complete list is included as Appendix A. The commitments addressed by this theme are:

140	Provide parents with additional information and strategies that support at home learning; emphasis will be placed on the early years in reading, writing, and math.
146	Amend the School Advisory Council mandate to give parents a more meaningful role.
148	Launch the website to provide parents with plain language information on what students are expected to learn and achieve at different grade levels.
160	Develop a province-wide, comprehensive single-entry career development, education, and employment service. Service would include more resources and support for in-school counselling and improve information sharing between business, labour, industry and education providers. (Public schools are one of several recipients and supports).

Initiative	Plan for 2005-06	Subsequent Years '06-07 to '08-09
Strengthen the capacity of School Advisory Councils to support education	$50,000 • Develop print resources (manual/guide) to support role of SACs • Develop orientation, other workshops; assist school boards with delivery • Establish regional co-ordination in each school board to improve support	Regional SAC professional development Biennial or triennial provincial conferences
Continue providing parent information, add information sessions, and a report card that includes progress on IPPs	$50,000 • More fact sheets and pamphlets for parents • Conferences for parents of students with special needs and African Nova Scotian parents • Implement provincial student report card	Additional parent information, including brochures, conferences, and individual student assessment results in mathematics and language arts
Strengthen relationships with education partners, to better support students in transition, including career resources to help students and parents	$100,000 • Upgrade Career Options tools and develop new labour market resources for parents • Start building labour market website with interface for teachers and guidance counselors	Ongoing

Initiative	Plan for 2005–06	Subsequent Years '06–07 to '08–09
Build community and business partnerships to help schools meet students' needs	$0 • Primarily as part of Options and Opportunities program, including resources at school boards to build partnerships • Continued liaison with NSCC, universities	Ongoing
Build government partnerships to support children and youth during public school years	$0 • Build the relationship with Health Promotion and school boards, relating to the $1.7 million allocated in HP budget • Continue collaboration with HP • Continued cross-departmental co-ordination of initiatives related to children and youth through CAYAC	Continue building new partnerships and collaboration to support school and student success

Conclusion and Next Steps

"We can best continue to work together with students as our first priority by keeping the lines of communication open between all partners in education—students, parents, teachers, SACs, school boards, government, community and business partners."

- Education Partner

Brighter Futures Together is the Department of Education's new four-year plan for the public school education system. We believe this is a solid plan based on what we have learned through consultations with our education partners. We are confident that by working together we will improve the public education system in Nova Scotia and ensure that students graduate with the best possible preparation for a bright future.

For 2005–06, public schools education funding was $928.6 million. Of this total, government has committed $21.4 million to the first year of implementation of this plan. This funding does not include $5.030 million in previously-committed funding for the final year of *Learning for Life*. This amount is in addition to increased funding school boards' base budgets to deliver ongoing educational programs and services for students, and to maintain other services that support education, like transportation or facilities maintenance.

The $21.4 million is allocated amongst the six themes as follows:

- Raising the Bar—$4.3 million
- Closing the Gap—$8.9million
- Healthy, Active Learners—$1.8 million *
- Time to Learn, Time to Teach—$4.6 million
- Measuring and Reporting on Success—$1.6 million
- Strengthening Partnerships—$0.2 million

* with an additional $1.7 million in the budget of Health Promotion for grants to school boards targeted to the healthy foods and physical equipment/research related initiatives

Learning for Life II is based on the lessons learned in the past few years of what works, and what still remains to be done. It reflects the input of a broad range of education partners. It addresses education commitments in government's *Blueprint*. This plan, along with initiatives in the department's business plan, takes action on all public school commitments in *Blueprint*.

This document outlines the plan of action for 2005–06. Next year, readers can expect a report on what was accomplished during 2005–06, and a second action plan for 2006–07. This annual report and action plan are intended to be repeated for each year of *Learning for Life II: Brighter Futures Together*, until the conclusion of the plan, in 2008–09.

2003 *Blueprint* Initiatives

Initiative	Initiatives Related to *Raising the Bar*
144	Expand the range of advanced high school in-class and distance education courses to include language arts, social sciences, and the arts.
147	Establish a province-wide School Accreditation Program with public reporting. Schools that need assistance will be provided with targeted resources, through the school advisory council, to support the school's improvement plan.
149	Initiate structural, administrative, and accountability changes, in consultation with teachers, school boards, and parent groups, to improve student results.
151	Continue to expand professional development opportunities for teachers in priority areas such as math and language arts.
152	Audit teachers teaching out of their field of study. Work with school boards, NSTU, and universities to identify strategies to better match teachers to their subject specialties.

Initiative	Initiatives Related to *Closing the Gap*
77	Train an additional 88 medical lab technologists, over the next four years, providing bursaries for those who agree to work in Nova Scotia (link to *Pathways* initiative).
137	Provide students with at least one million more books, math tools, learnware packages, and teaching resources (by year 4).
139	Use individualized test results (reading and math) and teacher assessments to identify struggling students; provide intervention and support in junior high to achieve better learning outcomes.
141	Complete the *Learning for Life* plan for students with special needs, including more professionals, assistive technology, Reading Recovery available to all Grade 1 classes, and individualized support for students.
142	Develop and fund a new tuition support program for special needs students and individual program plans. The program will include a faster appeal process, an ombudsman for students with special needs who will have authority to recommend options, providing funding to parents for students with IPPs attending private schools. Additional support could be offered to low-income families so ability to pay is not a barrier. As well, accountability agreements would be required with private schools.
143	Standards for all new teacher assistants and professional development for existing teacher assistants so their skills meet the needs of the children they support.
145	Add resources to support the long-term viability of isolated rural schools, including establishing minimum standards for delivering classroom and distance education.
154	Implement the recommendations of the Provincial Student Education Council report on bullying, including providing province-wide training sessions for teachers.
185	Implement the operational recommendations outlined in the *BLAC Report*.

Appendix A: 2003 *Blueprint* Initiatives

Initiative	Initiatives Related to *Developing Healthy and Active Learners*
61	Help Nova Scotia producers maximize their market share by increasing awareness of Nova Scotia-grown agricultural products as part of Brand Nova Scotia.
91	Aggressively promote "Knowledge is the Best Medicine," an education campaign designed to prevent the over-use or mis-use of prescription drugs (this topic is included in the grades primary–6 and 8 health education curriculum).
102	Continue to work on an evidence-based strategy to reduce Nova Scotia's high rates of chronic disease. Nova Scotia's Chronic Disease Prevention Plan will include a comprehensive, multi-year approach that includes targets and time lines.
105	Implement and fund the next steps outlined in Active Kids/Healthy Kids, Nova Scotia's physical activity strategy for children and youth.
106	Dedicate additional resources to support Esteem Team: Nova Scotia athletes going to schools to speak of the value and benefits of sport and healthy living.
108	Ensure our publicly owned schools are made available to support free after-school physical activities for youth. (Education as lead, Office of Health Promotion as partner).
109	Minimum 6 hours after-class time for community groups encouraging physical activity.
111	Dedicate resource within the Office of Health Promotion, the Youth Secretariat, and the Senior Citizen's Secretariat to identify and implement new community-based approaches that encourage healthy living among the young and old.
112	Work with school boards to implement healthy eating policies as part of the healthy eating strategy for Nova Scotia; *Our Healthy School* in all elementary schools by year 4.
113	Increase the number of Teen Health Centres throughout the province.
116	Create Nova Scotia's first School and Workplace Health Champions Award. Winning strategies for promoting good health will be publicized and provided with a financial reward to be used to support ongoing healthy school and workplace initiatives.
117	Work with the Department of Education, NSTU, and school boards to expand health curriculum professional development opportunities.
118	Introduce additional anti-smoking programs in schools and workplaces, including "You Choose" in schools (students determine anti-smoking ads).
119	Continue to fund Nova Scotia's Comprehensive Tobacco Control Strategy with a commitment to use a portion of additional revenue from future tobacco tax revenues to support anti-smoking programs and supports (Education confirmed as partner).
121	Develop a health information referral service and interactive website to respond to information requests on government and non-government (e.g., Health Charities Network, Sport Nova Scotia) health programs, services and information.
122	Maximize the value of Nova Scotia's public health professionals (public health nurses, addictions counsellors, paramedics, nutritionists, etc.) by examining new opportunities for their involvement in schools and Family Resource Centres.

Initiative	Initiatives Related to *Providing Time to Teach and Time to Learn*
129	Pilot a new Ready to Learn voluntary, free pre-school program for 4-year-olds, developed by the departments of Community Services, Education, and Health. Curriculum will be activity-based, and emphasize socialization skills, to help children become more "ready to learn" by the time they enter school. Assessments, such as hearing and speech, will be carried out through the Ready to Learn program. The first pilots will be in areas where day care access is limited, and where school space is now available. Pilot evaluation will determine the benefits of universal availability.
132	Further reduce class sizes to provide more one-on-one teaching time.
133	Beginning in 2005, combined primary–grade 1 classes will have a maximum of 20 students, or an additional non-teaching adult in the classroom; also for Primary and Grade 1 classes with students with special needs who have an individual program plan.
134	In 2006, the criteria (combined classes/IPP students) for a 20 student maximum will extend to grades 1–2 and 2–3 classes.
135	In 2006, all grade 3 classes will have a maximum of 25 students.
136	In 2007, all grade 4 classes will have a maximum of 25 students.

Initiative	Initiatives Related to *Measuring and Reporting on Success*
138	Continue testing program, including a new grade 6 language arts test, where parents are provided, for the first time, with their child's individualized test results.
139	Use individualized test results and teacher assessments to identify struggling students; provide intervention and support to achieve better learning outcomes.

Initiative	Initiatives Related to *Strengthening Partnerships*
140	Provide parents with additional information and strategies that support at home learning; emphasis will be placed on the early years in reading, writing, and math.
146	Amend the School Advisory Council mandate to give parents a more meaningful role.
148	Launch the website to provide parents with plain language information on what students are expected to learn and achieve at different grade levels.
160	Develop a province-wide, comprehensive single-entry career development, education, and employment service. Service would include more resources and support for in-school counselling and improve information sharing between business, labour, industry and education providers. (Public schools are one of several recipients and supports).

Invited Participant Organizations

(Alphabetical Order)

"[The Forum brought] together all different backgrounds and [showed] that all of us have a vested interest in our schools and our children."

- Education Partner

- Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority
- Black Educators Association
- Breakfast for Learning Nova Scotia Advisory Council
- Breakfast for Learning Coordinator
- Canadian Parents for French
- Caucus Offices (staff)
- Children and Youth Action Committee and regional chairs
- College de l'Acadie
- Communications Officers (School Boards and Government Departments)
- Council on African Canadian Education
- Federation of Acadian Parents of Nova Scotia
- First Nations Organizations
  - Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaw
  - Council of Mi'kmaw Education
  - Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey
  - Native Council of Nova Scotia
  - Nova Scotia Native Women's Association
  - Union of Nova Scotia Indians
- Government Departments including Deputy Ministers and key staff
  - Agriculture and Fisheries
  - Community Services
  - Health
  - Health Promotion
- Literacy Nova Scotia
- Members of the Legislative Assembly
- Multicultural Education Council of Nova Scotia
- Multicultural Association of Nova Scotia
- Nova Scotia Community College
- Nova Scotia Educational Leadership Consortium
- Nova Scotia Federation of Home and School Associations
- Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation
- Nova Scotia School Boards Association
- Nova Scotia Secondary School Students Association
- Provincial Student Education Council
- School Advisory Councils
- School Boards
- Selected special education groups
- Skills Partners Advisory Council

"The plan is comprehensive and has the potential to initiatiate for reaching improvements in the current system."

- Education Partner

Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities

Unions

- Canadian Union of Public Employees
- Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union
- Nova Scotia Teachers Union
- Nova Scotia Union of Public Employees
- Service International Employees Union

Universities

- Acadia University
- Dalhousie University
- Mount St. Vincent University
- St. Francis Xavier University
- St. Mary's University

For more information on
Learning For Life initiatives
visit <www.EDnet.ns.ca>.